DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 436 607 UD 033 210

TITLE	Making Standards Matter 1999: An Update on State Activity. Educational Issues Policy Brief Number 11.
INSTITUTION	American Federation of Teachers, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1999-11-00
NOTE	13p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Achievement; *Academic Standards; Elementary Secondary Education; *State Programs; *Testing Programs; Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

This policy brief highlights findings from an annual review of how far states' work on standards has progressed over the years and a determination of how much work remains to be done. Information was collected from state departments of education and interviews with state officials. Since 1995 there has been a steady rise in all aspects of standards-based reform. The number of states with clear and specific standards has almost doubled in the past 5 years from 13 to 22. Virtually all states have currently aligned, or plan soon to align, their state testing programs with their standards efforts. In 1995, 33 states reported aligned tests; today, 49 states report test alignment. The consequences associated with standards have increased significantly. Thirteen states have promotion policies based in part on state assessment results. Graduation requirements tied to at least 10th-grade standards have been implemented in 14 states, and incentives for students to reach standards are now in place in almost half the states. In 1996 only 10 states focused on students struggling to meet the standards, but in 1999, 29 states concentrate on these students. Although serious incentives and consequences tied to standards are being established, states still need to provide more resources to help students at risk. (SLD)

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ED 436 607

EDUCATIONAL ISSUES POLICY BRIEF
NUMBER 11 / NOVEMBER 1999

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Making Standards Matter 1999:
An Update on State Activity

Introduction

In 1992, in response to national concerns that students in America were not learning enough to compete in a global economy and that there was an intolerable gap between the achievement of whites and blacks, Albert Shanker, then president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), urged states to learn from other high achieving countries and set high and rigorous standards for all children and do what was necessary to make sure that they all had an opportunity to achieve them. At that time, it was controversial to insist that all students should be held to high standards. Some groups worried that testing would be unfair for students who were behind and would be harmful to them. But Shanker persisted with his view and since that time, standards-based reform has become part of the American reform landscape. A 1994 poll by Public Agenda, a survey research firm in New York, found that 82 percent of the parents polled were in favor of high standards for all students, and a 1999 poll by the Albert Shanker Institute reported that almost three out of four teachers nationwide and more than nine out of 10 principals favor the push to raise standards to improve student achievement.

The idea behind standards-based reform is to set clear standards for what we want students to learn and to use those academic standards to drive other changes in the system—e.g., curriculum, assessment, professional development. This may sound like common sense, but the idea is a relatively new one in this country. Some of our teachers, schools, and communities have always had high expectations for their children, but until recently, there has been little effort at the national, state, or local levels to set clear, measurable standards for what students in elementary, middle, and secondary schools should know and be able to do in the core academic subjects. Historically, states and districts haven't organized curriculum around a clearly defined set of expectations, nor have they developed assessment systems that measure whether students are meeting rigorous, publicly available standards.

The result, not surprisingly, is that students have been learning different things from school to school, district to district, and state to state; expectations for students have been highly variable and often are not high enough. Some children get exposed to rigorous courses; others don't. Some students get good grades only if they master challenging material; others get good grades and promotions no matter what they do. Many

UD033210

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students get passed from grade to grade regardless of how much they learn, and many graduate unprepared for work or postsecondary education. In such an environment, teachers who try to uphold high academic standards with tough grading and promotion policies and demanding homework are often pressured by administrators, parents, and students to ease up.

Without a system of standards, the negative effects of student mobility are compounded. One-fifth of students change schools each year, and in low-income neighborhoods the rates are much higher. With no common standards in place, mobile students usually arrive in their new classrooms way behind or ahead of the other students, which places a considerable strain on the teacher, the student, and the entire class.

Another consequence of this lack of clear standards is that components of the system which should be well aligned and working together—curriculum, assessment, teacher education, professional development—are largely disconnected. Many of the tests students take during the course of their school careers are not tied to the curriculum they are studying. And most training and professional development programs for teachers and other school staff lack focus and a clear connection to the standards and the curriculum.

The intent of the standards movement is to change this situation. With clear and rigorous standards to guide them, educators and other stakeholders can focus their energies and resources on improving the academic performance of our nation's students. Sound standards-based systems can help guarantee that all children, regardless of background or neighborhood, will be exposed to a rigorous academic curriculum throughout their educational careers. Such systems hold students to much higher standards than they have been expected to meet in the past and ensure that the standards and curriculum will be common across schools and districts, reducing the problems of low expectations for disadvantaged students and ameliorating the impact of student mobility. States and districts can help all students reach the standards by making the necessary resources and assistance available to those students in danger of failing. And all of this can spell the end for the destructive, deceptive practice of social promotion. It all begins with a strong set of standards.

Making Standards Matter

In 1995, five years after the first National Education Summit and one year after the Clinton administration's Goals 2000, both of which brought the standards issue to the forefront of the education community's systemic school reform, the AFT began tracking state efforts to develop standards and implement a standards-based reform. Until the release of our report in the summer of 1995, there had been no comprehensive analysis of education standards in the states.

Our first annual *Making Standards Matter* focused on how well states were doing in setting demanding standards for all students in the core subject areas—English, mathematics, science, and social studies. At that time, only 13 states had standards that were deemed to be sufficiently clear and specific so as to ensure a common curriculum for all children across the state. Since then, academic standards have become a central focus of the national discussion about improving schools.

Making Standards Matter 1999 is an effort to assess how far states' work on standards has progressed over the years and to determine how much work remains to be done. Through their persistent work to develop and improve academic standards, states have propelled the standards movement forward. Nationwide, states have placed content standards at the center of systemic reforms that focus on upgrading curriculum and strengthening accountability through initiatives and policies linked to standards. In this context, with so much depending on the standards, it is more important than ever to critically examine the quality of academic standards to determine if they are solid enough to support the reforms being built upon them.

Making Standards Matter focuses both on the quality of state standards and on the policies that are necessary to ensure that students reach those standards. The American Federation of Teachers believes that the success of school reforms in the states depends in large part on the quality of the academic standards states set for children and on how seriously those standards are taken by everyone connected with the schools. *Making Standards Matter* highlights some of the characteristics of high-quality standards and of systems that support such standards. We don't claim to have covered every important question that needs to be asked, but we do feel that each of the issues we raise here about stan-

dards, assessments, and the extent to which the standards will "count" is crucial for states to address.

We focused our analysis on a series of questions that cover standards, assessments, interventions, and incentives. This policy brief highlights the findings from *Making Standards Matter 1999* and charts the progress the country has made since 1995 when the AFT first published its analysis of state efforts to set standards. First we describe our method for analyzing the information we collected from state departments of education and from interviews with state officials. Next we summarize our findings on standards-based reform efforts in 1999, and finally we discuss the trends in standards reform since 1995 when we began examining this issue. The entire report can be found on the AFT's Internet site at www.aft.org/edissues/standards99.

Judging State Standards-Based Reforms

Questions on Standards

Issue 1: Does the state have, or is it in the process of developing, standards in the four core academic subjects—English, math, science, and social studies?

This criterion was easy to assess. We simply wanted to know which states have standards documents, regardless of what they are called—e.g., standards, frameworks, objectives, benchmarks—that describe what students should know and be able to do in each of the core academic subjects. Our intention with this criterion was not to judge the quality of the standards but to acknowledge states for having public standards documents focused on the four core disciplines.

Issue 2: Are the standards clear and specific enough to provide the basis for a common core curriculum from elementary through high school?

In looking at each state's standards documents, our task was to determine whether there was enough information about what students should learn to provide the basis for a common core curriculum. There is no perfect formula for this; it requires a series of judgment calls.

States that organize their standards grade by grade and thoroughly ground their standards in content usually do the best job of specifying what students should learn and when they should learn it. Grade-by-grade standards increase the likelihood that all students are exposed to a rigorous curriculum that is consistent from grade to grade, school to school, and district to district. Clear grade-by-grade standards also facilitate greater alignment of standards-based curriculum, assessments, textbooks, and instruction. Nonetheless, some states without grade-by-grade expectations provide enough information and present it clearly enough to meet our common core criterion.

We look for the following qualities to determine whether a set of standards meets our "common core" criterion:

- Standards must define in every grade, or for selected clusters of grades, the common content and skills students should learn in each of the core subjects.
- Standards must be detailed, explicit, and firmly rooted in the content of the subject area to lead to a common core curriculum.
- For each of the four core curriculum areas, particular content must be present at each level—i.e., elementary, middle school, high school.
  English standards should cover: reading basics (e.g., word attack skills, vocabulary), reading comprehension (e.g., exposure to a variety of literary genres), writing conventions (e.g., spelling, writing mechanics, and writing forms (e.g., narrative, persuasive, expository).
  Math standards should cover: number sense and operations, measurement, geometry, data analysis and probability, and algebra and functions.
  Science standards should cover: earth, physical, and life sciences.
  Social studies standards should cover: U.S. history, world history, and civics.
- Standards must provide attention to both content and skills.

Issue 3: Combining the Data—Who Meets Our Standards?

We focused our review on the specific strengths and weaknesses of each of the subject areas at each of the three levels—elementary, middle, and high school. For a state to be judged as having quality standards overall, it must have standards that are clear and specific in at least nine of the 12 categories (see Table 1) that we

judge. It is important to remember that even states meeting our criteria still have work to do to improve the clarity and specificity of the standards. For some states this work may be isolated to a single level; for others it may be an entire subject.

Table 1
The 12 Categories Used
To Judge Standards

Elementary	Middle School	High School
English	English	English
Math	Math	Math
Science	Science	Science
Social Studies	Social Studies	Social Studies

Questions on Assessments

Does or will the state have an assessment system aligned with the standards? If so, will the state assess students in all four core subjects in each of the three grade spans?

The AFT investigation of assessment policy was conducted through interviews of state officials only. We did not collect and analyze state tests nor did we verify state assertions about the alignment of their assessments with their standards. We established some basic principles of an effective state assessment system, and we asked states whether their assessments followed those principles. To receive credit, states must have (or plan to have) assessments that are linked to their standards, and they must assess (or plan to assess) all students in every district in the state in each of the core subjects at least once at each level. We give credit to states that plan to develop assessments, but only if the proper authority has signed off on that plan.

Questions on Making Standards Count—Extra Help and Incentives for Students

Issue 1: Does or will the state require and fund extra help for students having difficulty meeting the standards?

We were interested in finding out which states require extra academic assistance for students struggling to meet the state standards. We asked this question of state officials, emphasizing that merely "encouraging" schools and districts to do this isn't enough. We only give credit to states that both require extra help and provide funds/resources for districts and schools to carry this out. Our findings are based on interviews of state officials only. We have not analyzed the quality or timeliness of the intervention programs states and districts have in place. As with the assessment question, we give credit here to states that plan to require intervention in the future, but only if the proper authority has officially sanctioned the intervention and funding.

Issue 2: Does, or will, the state require districts and schools to make student promotion decisions based, in part, on state assessment results?

We asked officials if promotion to certain grade levels is or will be tied, in part, to standards and/or assessments? As in the previous question, it isn't enough for a state merely to encourage districts and schools to do this. To get credit, the state must require that meeting the publicly disseminated standards is one of the factors considered for student promotion into certain grades. We give credit to states that plan to implement such promotion policies in the future, but only if the proper state authority has authorized that idea.

Issue 3: Does the state have graduation exams linked to the standards that all students must pass to graduate from high school?

We do not give credit to states with "minimum competency" exit exams, that is, tests based on standards below a 10th-grade level. We only give credit to states that require (or plan to require) students to pass assessments linked to 10th-grade standards or above. This does not mean that the test is given in 10th grade, rather that the academic expectations of the test are set at a 10th-grade level or higher. A 10th-grade minimum standard does not imply that this is the highest standard we should expect students to meet; rather, it is the lowest acceptable standard that students should be held to. It is important to understand that we did not review the tests and rely, instead, on judgments provided by state officials that the content of the test is pegged at the 10th-grade level or higher.

For those states with graduation exams, we asked which subjects they cover. In our view, states that require students to pass exams in only one or two subjects are not ensuring that their children will receive a well-rounded academic education. We feel it is important for youngsters to be competent in all four core

subjects. As with the previous issues, we give credit to states that have or plan to put in place graduation exams in the four core areas.

Major Findings: Where We Are

Standards

States' commitment to standards-based reform remains strong. The District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and every state except Iowa have set or are setting common academic standards for students.

States deserve recognition for their sustained commitment to developing common, challenging standards to serve as the basis for systemic education reform. And states are clearly serious about working to ensure that all their children are exposed to challenging curricula in English, math, science, and social studies. Of the states developing standards, all but one—Rhode Island—have or are developing standards in each of the four core subjects.

The overall quality of the state standards continues to improve. Twenty-two states—up three from 1998—have standards that are generally clear and specific and grounded in particular content to meet AFT's common core criterion. (See Table 2.)

This is good news for states. The first step toward successful systemic reform is to develop standards capable of supporting the reforms built around them. Many states, however, still do not have standards that satisfy our common core criterion's requirements for clarity, specificity, and being firmly grounded in content. And many states with generally strong standards still can benefit from some fine-tuning. Considering this need to rework the standards, it is encouraging to note that many states view standards-setting as a work in progress. Since 1998, 38 states have developed new or revised standards—or created additional documents that clarify their standards.

Table 2
States with Standards that are Clear and Specific Enough To Meet the AFT Criteria

Alabama	New Mexico
Arizona	New York
California	North Carolina
Colorado	Ohio
Florida	Oklahoma
Georgia	Oregon
Kansas	Pennsylvania
Maryland	South Carolina
Massachusetts	South Dakota
Nebraska	Virginia
New Hampshire	West Virginia

Although standards have improved in many states, most states continue to have more difficulty setting clear and specific standards in English and social studies than in math and science.

The overall weakness of the social studies and English standards may be due, in part, to the controversy surrounding efforts to develop national standards in these subjects by the subject-area professional associations. The national history standards developed by the National Center for History in the Schools, and the English standards prepared by the National Council of Teachers of English, were both widely criticized when first released. The history standards were revised in response to the concerns, but the English standards were not. The math and science standards, developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Research Council, respectively, are more widely accepted in the field and are cited much more often in state standards documents than are the English or history standards.

- Twenty-one states have English standards that meet the AFT criteria at all three levels. Of particular importance, 13 of the states that do not meet our criteria fail to provide any guidance on the basic knowledge and skills students should learn at the elementary level to develop into proficient readers.
- Math standards in 41 states are generally clear, specific, and grounded in content across all three levels. In fact, 45 states meet our criteria at the elementary level, 44 states meet at the middle level, and 41 states meet at the high school level.

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- In science, 30 states meet the AFT criteria at all three levels. Thirty-four states have clear and specific science standards at the elementary level, 39 at the middle level, and 36 at the high school level.

- Social studies standards are particularly weak across the states; these standards tend to lack specific references to U.S. and/or world history. Only six states have social studies standards that are clear, specific, and grounded in content across all three levels of schooling. Standards tend to be clearest and most specific at the high school level—20 states meet the criteria. Sixteen states are clear and specific at the middle level compared to just eight at the elementary level.

Assessments

Every state but Iowa, Montana, and North Dakota is committed to measuring student achievement toward the standards.

The alignment of standards, curricula, and assessments is an important step in systemic reform. Many

Table 3

Assessment Programs

	The state has or will have an assessment system aligned with the standards	The aligned state assessments are or will be given in the four core areas	The aligned state assessments are or will be given in the four core areas at least once at each level	The state has documents describing the performance needed to meet the standards
Alabama	✔	✔	✔	✔
Alaska	✔			✔
Arizona	✔			
Arkansas	✔	✔		
California	✔	✔		
Colorado	✔			✔
Connecticut	✔			✔
Delaware	✔	✔	✔	
D.C.	✔			
Florida	✔	✔		✔
Georgia	✔	✔	✔	✔
Hawaii	✔			
Idaho	✔			
Illinois	✔	✔	✔	
Indiana	✔	✔		✔
Iowa				
Kansas	✔	✔		
Kentucky	✔	✔	✔	✔
Louisiana	✔	✔	✔	✔
Maine	✔	✔	✔	✔
Maryland	✔	✔	✔	✔
Massachusetts	✔	✔	✔	✔
Michigan	✔	✔	✔	
Minnesota	✔	✔		
Mississippi	✔	✔		
Missouri	✔	✔	✔	

states (28) rely on commercially developed standardized tests to measure and report on student achievement, and some (12) claim alignment of their standards with these assessments. But as states develop their own standards, they are turning away from the traditional standardized tests and are developing new assessments to measure their standards. Indeed, today 47 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have or will have state assessments based on the state standards in at least one of the four core subject areas; 38 states have or will have aligned assessments in all four core subjects, and 25 states have or are planning to test all students at all three levels in the four core subjects. (See Table 3.)

Through test items, scoring rubrics, and/or student work samples, many states (26) describe the level of mastery students must demonstrate to meet the state standards.

Students, teachers, and parents are likely to ask, "What does student work that satisfies the standards look like?" Documents that show the level of work expected on the state assessments give students, teach-

	The state has or will have an assessment system aligned with the standards	The aligned state assessments are or will be given in the four core areas	The aligned state assessments are or will be given in the four core areas at least once at each level	The state has documents describing the performance needed to meet the standards
Montana				
Nebraska	✔	✔	✔	
Nevada	✔	✔		✔
New Hampshire	✔	✔		✔
New Jersey	✔	✔	✔	✔
New Mexico	✔	✔	✔	✔
New York	✔	✔	✔	✔
North Carolina	✔	✔		✔
North Dakota				
Ohio	✔	✔	✔	✔
Oklahoma	✔	✔	✔	
Oregon	✔	✔	✔	✔
Pennsylvania	✔			✔
Puerto Rico	✔	✔	✔	
Rhode Island	✔			✔
South Carolina	✔	✔	✔	
South Dakota	✔	✔	✔	
Tennessee	✔	✔		
Texas	✔	✔		✔
Utah	✔	✔	✔	
Vermont	✔	✔		✔
Virginia	✔	✔	✔	✔
Washington	✔			✔
West Virginia	✔	✔	✔	
Wisconsin	✔	✔	✔	
Wyoming	✔			
TOTALS	**49**	**38**	**25**	**26**

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ers, and parents valuable insight into the state's expectations for student performance and mastery of the standards. Such documents are also useful professional development tools.

Making Standards Count—Incentives and Consequences

Fourteen states have policies for ending social promotion—the practice of passing students from grade to grade regardless of whether they have mastered standards. And 13 of those states link their promotion policy to the standards (Table 4).

The long-term consequences of moving from grade to grade despite having failed to learn will eventually catch up with students and hinder future success in school and in life. Social promotion diminishes the incentive for students to work hard and ultimately compromises the effectiveness of a system based on standards. If students observe that they can pass from one grade to the next despite their failure to satisfy the standards, the value of the standards and all related components is degraded. The number of states that link promotion to achievement of the standards has increased since 1996. This increase represents a growing awareness of social promotion as a damaging, deceptive practice.

More states (28) have or will have high school exit exams based on the standards as compared to last year (24). And more states with "minimum competency" exit exams are "upgrading" these tests to reflect 10th-grade standards or higher. (See Table 5.)

Graduation exams are the most common way for states to hold students accountable for learning. This year, 28 states have committed to linking their high school diploma to achievement of the standards in at least one subject area, and, according to state officials, 14 of those states based their assessment on at least 10th-grade standards. Furthermore, seven of those 14 states measure student performance in all four core subjects.

Table 4
Promotion Policies

	The state has or will have a promotion policy	The state's promotion policy is or will be based on the standards	The state's promotion policy is or will be based on the standards in the four core subjects
Arkansas	✔	✔	
California	✔	✔	
Delaware	✔	✔	
D.C.	✔	✔	
Florida	✔	✔	
Illinois	✔	✔	
Louisiana	✔	✔	
Nevada	✔		
North Carolina	✔	✔	
Ohio	✔	✔	
South Carolina	✔	✔	✔
Texas	✔	✔	
Virginia	✔	✔	✔
Wisconsin	✔	✔	✔
TOTALS	**14**	**13**	**3**

Twenty-three states have or are developing incentives (advanced diplomas, free college tuition) to motivate students to achieve a higher standard than that required of all students.

Policies that link promotion and graduation to meeting the standards reinforce their importance and can effectively motivate students to work hard. In addition, as Table 6 shows, many states are also offering a variety of incentives to encourage students to surpass the expectations set by the standards.

- Twenty states have or will have advanced diplomas for students who reach a higher standard than the minimum required for graduation.
- Eight states offer college admissions, free tuition, and/or stipends to students who meet a higher standard on state assessments and/or who take advanced courses such as Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses.

Table 5

State Officials Report on Exit Exams

	State has or will have exit exams that all students must pass to graduate and that are based on the standards	The exit exams are or will be based on the 10th-grade standards or higher	The exit exams are or will be based on 10th-grade standards or higher in the four core subjects
Alabama	✔	✔	✔
Alaska	✔	✔	
Arizona	✔		
California	✔		
Delaware	✔		
D.C.	✔		
Florida	✔	✔	
Georgia	✔	✔	✔
Hawaii	✔	✔	
Idaho	✔		
Indiana	✔		
Louisiana	✔	✔	✔
Maryland	✔		
Massachusetts	✔		
Minnesota	✔		
Mississippi	✔		
Nevada	✔	✔	
New Jersey	✔	✔	✔
New Mexico	✔	✔	✔
New York	✔		
North Carolina	✔	✔	
Ohio	✔	✔	✔
South Carolina	✔	✔	✔
Tennessee	✔		
Texas	✔		
Utah	✔	✔	
Virginia	✔		
Washington	✔	✔	
TOTALS	**28**	**14**	**7**

Table 6

Incentives for Students To Reach Even Higher Standards

	Advanced Diplomas	College Incentives – Admissions Tuition Stipends
Alabama	✔	
California	✔	
Connecticut	✔	
Georgia	✔	✔
Hawaii	✔	
Illinois	✔	
Kentucky	✔	✔
Louisiana		✔
Maryland	✔	
Michigan		✔
Minnesota	✔	
Missouri		✔
Nevada	✔	
New York	✔	
Ohio	✔	✔
Oregon	✔	✔
Pennsylvania	✔	
Rhode Island	✔	
South Carolina	✔	
Texas	✔	
Vermont	✔	
Virginia	✔	
West Virginia	✔	✔
TOTALS	**20**	**8**

Support for Struggling Students

Since our 1998 report, 29 states, an increase of nine, require and fund academic intervention programs for students who are struggling to meet the standards.

To help all students reach high standards, schools must identify those students who are having trouble meeting the standards and give them the extra help they need to succeed. Early intervention can prevent problems from snowballing and represents a more promising option for addressing underachievement than either retention or social promotion; a crackdown on social promotion will backfire unless intervention

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Table 7
Intervention Programs

	State requires or will require intervention	State requires or will require and fund intervention	Intervention is or will be required, funded, and based on the standards	Intervention is or will be required, funded, and based on the standards in the four core areas	Intervention in the four core areas is or will be required and funded at each level
Alabama	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Alaska	✔	✔	✔		
Arizona	✔				
Arkansas	✔	✔	✔		
California	✔	✔	✔		
Colorado	✔	✔	✔		
Connecticut	✔	✔	✔		
Delaware	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
D.C.	✔	✔	✔		
Florida	✔	✔	✔		
Georgia	✔	✔	✔		
Idaho	✔	✔	✔		
Illinois	✔	✔	✔		
Indiana	✔	✔	✔		
Kansas	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Kentucky	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Louisiana	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Maryland	✔				
Massachusetts	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Michigan	✔				
Minnesota	✔	✔	✔		
Nevada	✔	✔	✔		
New Jersey	✔				
New York	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
North Carolina	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Ohio	✔				
Oklahoma	✔	✔	✔		
Oregon	✔				
Pennsylvania	✔	✔	✔		
Puerto Rico	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
South Carolina	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Tennessee	✔				
Texas	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Utah	✔				
Vermont	✔	✔	✔	✔	✔
Virginia	✔	✔	✔	✔	
Washington	✔				
West Virginia	✔	✔	✔		
Wisconsin	✔				
Wyoming	✔				
TOTALS	**40**	**29**	**29**	**13**	**10**

programs are in place. Targeted assistance programs can take a variety of forms—after-school tutoring, one-on-one tutoring, and Saturday school to name a few—but whatever the form, intervention must reach struggling students early, before they fall too far behind. Identifying and providing intervention to underachieving students can be an expensive undertaking and should be shared by the state.

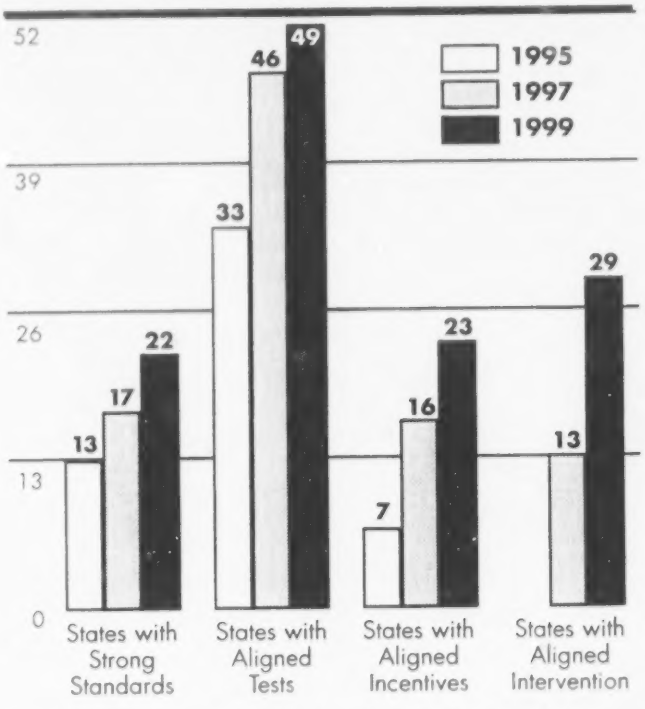
- Although 40 states require districts to provide intervention to students who are struggling, only 29 provide funding to districts earmarked specifically for intervention. All 29 states have or will have intervention programs aligned with the standards. Furthermore, while the state may provide intervention, in some instances that intervention may not begin early enough. For example, Minnesota does not fund intervention before the eighth grade, even though students may be falling behind in the earlier grades. (See Table 7.)
- When we asked states the specific subjects and grades they target for intervention, we found that only 13 states provide extra academic help in all four core subjects and only 10 of them provide help in the four core subjects at each of the three levels.

The Progress States Have Made

Figure 1 presents the trend data. Much progress has been made since 1995 when we began charting the course of standards-based reform in the states. There has been a steady rise in all aspects of standards-based reform.

- The number of states with clear and specific standards has almost doubled in the past five years from 13 to 22.
- While standards in many states still need further clarification and rigor, virtually all states have currently aligned, or plan soon to align their state testing programs with their standards efforts. In 1995, 33 states reported to have aligned tests; today it is true for 49.
- Consequences associated with the standards have increased significantly. In 1996, the first year we inquired about this issue, only three states based promotion policies in part on state assessment results; today 13 states—more than four times as many—do.
- Graduation requirements tied to at least 10th-grade standards has doubled from only seven in 1995 to 14 in 1999.
- Incentives for students to reach standards are now in place in almost half the states—a tripling from 7 in 1995 to 23 today.
- And perhaps of greatest importance, the attention states are paying to help students who are struggling to meet the standards has gone from a mere 10 states in 1996 to 29 this year, almost a threefold increase.

Figure 1
Standards-Based Reform:
State* Progress (1995-1999)



* In this report, "state" tallies are based on the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

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Where We Need To Go

Standards-based reform is clearly taking hold. There has been considerable positive movement in only a short period of time, but still much more needs to be done.

- Many states need to improve their standards so as to assure a common core across the state for all children. Furthermore, states need to assist in the design of curricula aligned to their standards.
- Teachers need professional development to assist them in delivering standards-based instruction. In particular, training must take place to help teachers form a common understanding as to what student work is like that meets the standards. Although we have not collected data on state efforts in support of professional development, we know that teachers do not always feel prepared to teach to these standards.
- It is heartening to see that states are beginning to provide funds and programs to assist students in meeting the challenging standards. Nonetheless, more needs to be done to assure that students have the necessary opportunities to achieve the standards.

In sum, the standards-based movement in America is on solid footing and is slowly but surely changing the way we think of teaching and learning in America's classrooms. Nearly three-fourths of teachers who had worked with standards for at least six years say the standards have had a positive impact on their school.

But we are a long way from a well-developed standards-based system. Not enough states have rigorous standards, and this is particularly true in regard to English and social studies. Indeed, in some states, testing seems to be running ahead of adequate standards and curriculum development. Teachers need much more opportunity to learn about the standards and the level of student work that indicates mastery of those standards. And while we are pleased to see serious incentives and consequences tied to the standards and assessments, states still need to provide more resources to help students at risk of meeting the standards to be successful.

Resources

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